

U.S. Eyes Peking's Role Among Rebels in Congo

By Donald H. Louchheim
Staff Reporter

United States officials called the situation in the revolt-pocked Congo "very serious" yesterday and underlined signs of increasing Chinese Communist influence among the rebels.

As concern mounted over the ability of Premier Moise Tshombe's government to survive the series of provincial rebellions, the officials also declared that the United States has no intention of making any kind of military commitment to the Congo that would lead to an "African Viet-nam."

On the military plane, it was said, Washington's major objective is "to stiffen" the Congolese Army with air and ground transport equipment and to provide adequate protection for the 1700 Americans in the huge country.

On the diplomatic level, the United States is trying to persuade Tshombe to recognize publicly "the urgency of the situation," the officials said.

The officials noted that Tshombe privately has conceded the need for direct outside military assistance despite public statements that no foreign troops would be necessary.

Small Force Needed

They said they hoped to persuade Tshombe to call on "friendly African nations" for military contingents to provide the Congolese Army with a "psychological uplift."

It was noted that the mere presence of a relative handful of United Nations troops in the Congo before their withdrawal June 30 had served to keep the revolts in check.

The officials said they

thought three battalions of outside African troops, with support units, could be enough to turn the tide.

American policy, the officials explained, is aimed at "the preservation of the territorial integrity of the Congo" and support of the Central Government in Leopoldville.

Balkanization of the Congo, it was said, would increase the danger of Communist penetration and could touch off tribal revolts and secession movements throughout the rest of Africa.

But it was stressed that a military solution must be within "an African context."

The Congolese revolts began in January and have spread throughout the central and northern regions of the country, which is as big as the United States east of the Mississippi. A State Department briefing map with revolt-tory towns marked in red gives the sprawling Congo the case of the measles.

The officials emphasized that they do not think the active Communist Chinese embassies in neighboring Burundi and the former French Congo incited or are managing the revolts.

But they said the Chinese presence has added "an edge" to the series of revolts that has made them "increasingly dangerous."

War Manuals Found

The officials said that up-to-date Chinese guerrilla warfare manuals and pamphlets have been found on recently captured rebels in the eastern Congo.

They said they had estab-

lished that Kwilu Province rebel leader Pierre Mulele had returned from a year's training in Peking last summer and that Kivu Province leader Gaston Soumialot is in close touch with China's embassy in Burundi.

In addition, they said rebel broadcasts from the recently captured city of Stanleyville, the Congo's third largest, were definitely too sophisticated to be of Congolese origin.

But they said that Peking had spent "little money" in the Congo and that if there were any Chinese on the ground they must number less than 100.

In emphasizing that the Administration had no intention of getting involved in an "African Viet-Nam," the officials were replying to a charge yesterday by Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.).

Commitment Feared

Stennis asked in the Senate whether the dispatch of four U.S. transports and 106 servicemen to the Congo earlier this week might not be "the first of a series of steps which will ultimately lead to a heavy commitment of men and material" like the "undeclared war" in Viet-Nam.

The Administration officials called such a comparison "false" and "far-fetched."

They said the logistics problems for routing supplies to the rebels virtually ruled out a large-scale communist involvement. They also noted that because of "the low level of competence" in the Congolese Army there is a "definite limit on the level of aid you can usefully send in" to back the Central Government.

The officials said they "would doubt seriously that the Congo situation will escalate."